

HOW HE GOT EVEN

Opie Reed Tells How a Bear
Fighter Came to Grief.

HIS BEAR WAS A SUBSTITUTE

Sharp Practice Prevailed Against Hard
Knocks and the Man who was Wal-
lowed Quit a Winner.

One of the most striking characters that ever lived in the character-gathering community of Hot Springs, Ark., was old Stephen Butterfield. No one knew the place of his original shade, the starting ground of his quaint and respectable career, and indeed no one seemed to care, but every one that came within his range was impressed with his odd personality. He was tall and gaunt and grained; his eyes were afflicted with a watery sleepiness, but suddenly became eager at the sight of a solace. He kept a sort of roadside, which he designated as Bear park, near the town of Hot Springs, and made his living by administering to the thirst and catering to the amusement of the wayfarer man, who, even though a fool, often erred therein; erred, I say, for the man who drank the sour beer drawn by old Steve could not have stopped short of slapping against self. The amusement consisted of a black bear, old, lazy and sea-bitten. This animal, advertised as of most furious disposition, was kept chained to a tree in a back lot; and at evening, when the accommodating dusk threw a hazy shade over the bear's most striking faults, i. e., laziness and sea bites, old Steve would announce to his guests that he was now about to engage in the dangerous feat of wrestling with the ferocious monster from the Mississippi swamps. Those who knew the trick drank their beer in unobtrusive, but those who did not paid twenty-five cents and passed into the back lot to see the desperate encounter.

One afternoon when old Steve was sitting on his veranda a man from the mountains came, along driving a red mule and a white steer hitched to a shabby and creaking wagon. In the wagon there were a few small cabbages and a black bear.

"Say," said the mountain man, stopping his team, "don't you want to buy the finest bear you ever seen?"

"No," Steve replied; "got all the bear I want."

"But you ain't got no such bear as this here one."

"No, and I don't want no such a kitten of a thing as that."

"Now look here, mister, that ain't no way to do—insult a man's bear. I have traveled seventy-five miles with this bear and you air the last man that has offered him a insult. That ain't no insult the common courtesy that is



STEVE WISHED A TELL

due a bear that ain't never done you no harm. But puttin' all that to one side, let me ask you seriously if you want to buy a bear?"

"I told you that I've got all the bear I want," old Steve sharply replied.

The mountain man gathered up his hickory staff as if he would drive on, but then, with the appearance of having changed his mind, stretched his long neck toward old Steve and said:

"When you say you've got all the bear you want, I reckon you mean that house-grown and house-bred invader out yonder in the back lot."

Steve got up, and, through the force of a custom acquired in earlier life, lifted the seat of his trousers. The mountain man again had gathered his hickory for a decisive blow at his mule, but a hoarse command from old Steve—his command unintelligible as to words, but full of meaning, nevertheless—compelled his attention. Steve, mastering his anger, and attempting to speak in a quiet way, said: "I have been living here a good while and have learned how to be smooth in my manners, but when a man that I ain't never passed in no way comes along here and willfully insults a member of my family, why, it's time for me to act."

"I don't know nothin' about your family and wouldn't ther'for insult a member of it," the mountain man replied. "You said that this here bear is a kitten of a thing, and then I said that the bear over yonder in the lot is bug-out, and I am willing to leave it to any jury that can be raised up in this town that I am right. I know what it is to be bug-out, and I don't blame the bear, for I figgered he could help it. I had a dog once that was bug-out—was kind-hearted and gentlemanly a dog as you ever seen—and I didn't hold him responsible. Say, now, without any mo' foolishness, don't you want to buy a bear?"

Steve placed his hand on a post to steady himself. He looked at the mountain man with all the contempt he could throw into his watery eyes, and then, still under so strong a restraint that the buggy knees of his trousers quivered, Steve delivered himself:

"I am tryin' to make an honest livin' and I hope to join the church some day, but if you don't go away from here I'll put you, and I'll make it a pint of jurtin' you mighty bad. Do you hear?"

"Oh, yes, I hear, and rather than have any difficulty, I'll harken, but I do hope that here you join the church and be a member of the day is over, for that matter, you may change your mind about this bear. Got up, boy. He swung his hickory, and dealt the mule a decisive blow.

Business was dull and Steve nodded and dreamed as he sat on the veranda. He was aroused by a noise, and looking up he saw that the mountain man had again stopped at the gate.

"Look here," Steve called, now under very little restraint, "thought I told you to go on away from here."

"You did tell me, and I did go away, but that didn't keep me from comin' back again. I have been to nearly every place in this town, and nobody

has begun to crowd into my mind that the bear market down here is pretty dull. Down yonder just now the thought struck me that after all you must want a real bear, and as I am willing to help you out with your wants, I will let you have this here one for ten dollars."

Steve went out to the gate. He put his elbows on a wheel of the wagon, and looking hard at the mountain man, said:

"I have been very kind to you."

"I haven't made that discovery, but if you have been kind to me I'm much obliged."

"I have been kind to you, and now I want to tell you what I'm goin' to do; I'm goin' to maul you."

And he did maul him. He snatched the mountain man out of the wagon and wallowed him in the road. And during the performance the bear sat in the wagon and looked on with an indiffer-



AFTER THE BATTLE

ence complete in every detail. The mountain man climbed back to his seat as soon as Steve granted him that privilege, and, gathering up his hickory, said: "After all, I reckon you know your own mind best—don't reckon you really do want to buy a bear. Good-by, sah!"

Evening came and strangers who had heard that a desperate man would wrestle with a ferocious bear gathered at the place of encounter.

"Now, gentlemen," said Steve, "the time has come for me to show you what a white man can do. All my folks were bear fighters, and so far as heard from not one of them was ever whipped. Some hunters have just brought in a monstrous bear from down in the bottoms, and all that want to see me fight him just pay twenty-five cents and come ahead."

A number of men paid their money and followed him into the back lot. Those who were acquainted with the indolent habits of the bear, said nothing, partly through fear of increasing the enmity of old Steve, but mainly to foster a laugh at the expense of the gullible "benderfoot."

Steve conducted the spectators to the tree where the bear was chained. The brown of evening, making a mystery of the huge black mass of animal life, and hiding the patches on his coat, proclaimed him a savage monster.

"Gentlemen," said Steve, "beho' I go into this here fight, I want to tell you that I don't deserve no sympathy, for I have brought it on myself. Here goes."

He made a lunge at the bear. The monster threw himself in an upright position against the tree and caught Steve in his arms. For a moment there was silence, and then a loud yell split the stillness of the deepening twilight. The bear boxed Steve, he hugged him time and again and then appeared to be biting him.

"Take him away! he's killin' me!" the gladiator cried. Two men seized Steve's legs and drew him beyond the bear's reach, and the monster—and indeed he was one now—stretched his chain in his efforts to renew the engagement. Steve was taken into the house. He was covered with blood and it was evident that a number of his ribs were broken.

"Have you anything to say?" some one asked. "It may be probable that you can't talk after awhile."

"All that I've got to say is this," Steve growled. "I wish I hadn't got so intimate with that blamed bear."

Several men went out with a lantern to look at the victim. They found nothing but a chain under the tree, but down further, in a fence corner, they found a worn and sea-bitten bear asleep. Had they continued their search, however, they might have found, down the road, a mountain man helping his bear into a wagon; and they might possibly have learned that the mountain man, for purposes peculiarly his own, had liberated the lazy brute and had temporarily chained his own bear to the tree.



"SAY, DO YOU WANT TO BUY A BEAR?"

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OPINION IN INDIA.

A missionary in Bengal has been doing the opium work in the town of Bangalore. Most of the smokers he saw belonged to the laboring classes. With one second the smokers told him that the drug dried up their bodies and that their craving for it was such that they could not give it up. Many of the dams have a hundred patrons a day. The missionary says opium-smoking in India is bringing ruin and degradation upon innumerable families, and he accuses the British government of fostering this demoralizing habit.

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